

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 024432
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TO AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE IMMEDIATE

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E.O. 11652:N/A

TAGS: SHUM, GB, US

SUBJECT: ANNUAL HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT- GABON

REF: STATE 18330

1. FOLLOWING IS APPROVED TEXT OF HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT
WHICH WILL BE SUBMITTED TO CONGRESS JAN. 31. LOCAL OFFI-
CIALS SHOULD BE INFORMED IN ACCORDANCE WITH REFTEL INSTRU-
CTIONS. REPORT TO BE DISCUSSED GABONESE AMBASSADOR.
QUOTE: GABON

GABON IS A ONE-PARTY STATE IN WHICH POLITICAL POWER IS
EFFECTIVELY CONCENTRATED IN THE PRESIDENCY. GIVEN THE
COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC PROSPERITY, SMALL POPULATION, AND
LACK OF ETHNIC TENSIONS, THERE IS LITTLE OPPOSITION TO THE
PRESENT LEADERSHIP, WHICH HAS BEEN IN OFFICE SINCE 1967.
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WHILE POLITICAL ACTIVITIES ARE CIRCUMSCRIBED TO WITHIN
THE SINGLE PARTY, CIVIL AND INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS ARE GENERALLY
RESPECTED.

1. RESPECT FOR THE INTEGRITY OF THE PERSON, INCLUDING
FREEDOM FROM:

A. TORTURE

TORTURE IS PROHIBITED BY LAW IN GABON, AND THIS PROHIBITION APPEARS TO BE FOLLOWED IN PRACTICE.

B. CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT

WE HAVE NO INFORMATION THAT SUCH TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT OCCURS.

C. ARBITRARY ARREST OR IMPRISONMENT

ARBITRARY ARREST AND IMPRISONMENT ARE RARE. POLITICAL DETENTIONS HAVE OCCURED, BUT THE PRACTICE IS NOT WIDESPREAD OR SYSTEMATIC. PROLONGED DETENTION IS USUALLY BASED ON COURT SENTENCES. WE HAVE NO INFORMATION TO CONFIRM THAT GABON HOLDS ANY DETAINEES.

D. DENIAL OF FAIR PUBLIC TRIAL

THE RIGHT TO A FAIR, PUBLIC TRIAL IS RESPECTED IN CIVIL AND CRIMINAL CASES.

3. INVASION OF THE HOME

INVASION OF THE HOME DOES NOT OCCUR WITH GOVERNMENT
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SANCTION.

2. GOVERNMENTAL POLICIES RELATING TO THE FULFILLMENT OF SUCH VITAL NEEDS AS FOOD, SHELTER, HEALTH CARE AND EDUCATION:

GABON'S LARGE MINERAL AND TIMBER RESOURCES (OIL, URANIUM, MANGANESE, UNEXPLOITED IRON ORE) AND ITS SMALL POPULATION (600,000) HAVE LED TO DISTORTIONS IN ECONOMIC POLICY WHICH THE GOVERNMENT HAS BEGUN TO ADDRESS. GIVEN ITS SUBSTANTIAL FOREIGN EXCHANGE EARNINGS, GABON HAS TENDED TO IMPORT VIRTUALLY EVERYTHING IT NEEDS FROM EUROPE. AN INCREASINGLY URBAN POPULATION HAS LEARNED TO LIVE OFF OF IMPORTED FOODSTUFFS PURCHASED AT INFLATED PRICES BECAUSE OF DOMESTIC PRODUCTION SHORT-FALLS. EARLIER GABONESE CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMS FOCUSED PRIMARILY ON DEVELOPMENT OF MINERAL RESOURCES. IN THE PAST YEAR, HOWEVER, THE GOVERNMENT HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY AWARE OF THE NEED TO IMPROVE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY, AND TO BETTER THE CONDITION OF THE RURAL DWELLER.

3. RESPECT FOR CIVIL AND POLITICAL LIBERTIES, INCLUDING:

A. FREEDOM OF THOUGHT, SPEECH, PRESS, RELIGION, AND

ASSEMBLY

FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND SPEECH ARE GENERALLY UNRESTRICTED EXCEPT IN THE POLITICAL DOMAIN. ALTHOUGH PRESIDENT BONGO HAS CONVERTED FROM CATHOLICISM TO ISLAM, THERE ARE NO RESTRICTIONS ON RELIGIOUS WORSHIP OR MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES IN THE COUNTRY. WHILE THERE ARE ALSO NO LEGAL RESTRICTIONS ON THE RIGHT OF ASSEMBLY, THE EXISTENCE OF A SINGLE POLITICAL PARTY, THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF GABON (DPG), AND A GOVERNMENT-APPROVED LABOR FEDERATION MEANS THAT IN PRACTICE ALL ASSEMBLIES FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES

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ABOVE THE VILLAGE LEVEL REQUIRE DE FACTO GOVERNMENT APPROVAL. ORGANIZED LABOR IN GABON IS CLOSELY AFFILIATED WITH THE RULING POLITICAL PARTY. THE PRESS IS GOVERNMENT CONTROLLED. THE GOVERNMENT MAKES NO EFFORT TO RESTRICT FREEDOM OF THOUGHT OR INTELLECTUAL ENQUIRY.

B. FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT WITHIN THE COUNTRY, FOREIGN TRAVEL AND EMIGRATION

THERE ARE NO SIGNIFICANT RESTRICTIONS ON EMIGRATION AND THE FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT WITHIN OR TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY.

C. FREEDOM TO PARTICIPATE IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

GABON IS A ONE PARTY STATE AND ALL CANDIDATES FOR POLITICAL OFFICE MUST HAVE THE APPROVAL OF THE PARTY. THE PRESIDENT IS ELECTED BY UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE FOR A SEVEN-YEAR TERM CONCURRENTLY WITH THE DEPUTIES OF THE UNICAMERAL NATIONAL ASSEMBLY.

4. GOVERNMENT ATTITUDE AND RECORD REGARDING INTERNATIONAL AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL INVESTIGATION OF ALLEGED VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS:

GABON HAS NOT ALWAYS BEEN RESPONSIVE TO REQUESTS FOR OUTSIDE INVESTIGATIONS. ALTHOUGH AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL DID NOT INCLUDE A SECTION ON GABON IN ITS 1977 REPORT, THE 1976 REPORT STATED THAT THE GABONESE GOVERNMENT DID NOT COOPERATE WITH THE ORGANIZATION'S CAMPAIGN FOR A GENERAL AMNESTY IN THE COUNTRY. HOWEVER, THE REPORT STATES THAT IN DECEMBER 1975, PRESIDENT BONGO ANNOUNCED AN AMNESTY FOR ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS WHO WERE SENTENCED

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SIX MONTHS EARLIER, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF ONE. END QUOTE.
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